

Public policy alienation of public service workers: A conceptual framework

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"I will sing to cheer you and to make you thoughtful too," said the nightingale. "But if I am to sing, I must be free to fly about the kingdom."

Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875), the nightingale

1 INTRODUCTION

Dutch service worker in the (semi-)public sector are confronted with a number of often contradicting rationalities (WRR, 2004). For a public service worker, who on a regular basis directly interacts with clients (from now on: the public service worker) the most important rationalities are the *institutional*, the *client* and the *professional* rationality. The public policies the service workers have to implement, laid down by the institutional rationality, are often not congruent with the demands of clients and the standards of the professional association (WRR, 2004). As a result, the service worker experiences an *identification problem with public policies he/she has to implement* (Van den Brink, Jansen, & Pessers, 2006; WRR, 2004). A clarifying example is the case of medical practitioners in the Netherlands, working for the social service (Dutch: UWV). The medical practitioners have to determine if a person is a rightful claimant of, for example, welfare based on the disability to work. Nowadays, they have to implement a new policy (institutional rationality) determining if a person is entitled for this kind of welfare (Dutch new law 'WIA'). But according to many medical practitioners, implementing this policy sometimes leads to qualifying unfit persons able to work (Willems & Kroneman, 2003). For the medical practitioner, this causes a tension between the institutional rationality (the new policy) on the one hand, and the client rationality (demands of the clients) and the professional rationality (honest and professional standards) on the other. As a result, these medical practitioners can have difficulties identifying with this new policy.

This paper theoretically examines identification problems with the implementation of public policies. When these identification problems occur, they might have significant impacts. For instance, the quality of the interaction between service workers and clients influence the effectiveness and legitimacy of public administration. the success of public policies for a great deal depends on the compliance and motivation of the service worker implementing them.

There are various themes in the literature related to the identification problems of (public) service workers, for example Public Service Motivation (Perry, 2000), New Public Management (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004), technology (Zuboff, 2004), street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980) and organization commitment (Steinhaus & Perry, 1996). But mainstream literature has not yet studied the problem of identification of the service worker with public policies. These disciplines will, however, be used to construct propositions for the identification problem. This paper seeks to fill this lacuna by using the concept of alienation, a concept originating from the sociology of work and organization. Literature from this discipline offers useful concepts for building our theoretical framework. All in all, the project offers a multidisciplinary approach, combining the research fields of public management, public policy sciences and the sociology of work and organization.

The purpose of the paper is to conceptualize public policy alienation of public service workers. Another purpose is, by using literature from various research fields, to investigate which factors possibly influence the degree of public policy alienation. This amounts to the following two research questions:

Research questions

- 1) How can public policy alienation of public service workers be understood and conceptualized?
- 2) What are the main factors influencing public policy alienation of public service workers?

This paper consists, after this section, of three sections. Public policy alienation will be conceptualized in the second section, thereby answering the first research question. The next section will offer a theoretical framework for answering the second research question by explicating possible factors influencing public policy alienation of public service workers, using literature from various disciplines. The last section concludes and shows the implications of the study for the research field and public policy and practice.

2 THE CONCEPT OF PUBLIC POLICY ALIENATION

The goal of this section is to define the concept of public policy alienation. Firstly, the background of the alienation concept is given, concentrating mainly on the works of Marx and Mannheim. Thereafter, the concept of policy alienation is defined.

Background of the alienation concept

The concept of alienation used in the scientific literature after the Second World War can be traced directly to Hegel and Marx. They both saw capitalism as the main cause of alienation. Hegel wrote about alienation primarily in the economic and legal frame. Marx concentrates on the alienation from labor, building on the alienation concept of Hegel.

Marx (1961 [1844]) distinguished four types of alienation.. The first type focuses on the product of labor. It deals with the relationship between the subject (the worker) and the object (the product). The subject is alienated from the object; the product has power over the worker. We label this type (labor)product-alienation. The second type deals with the relation between the worker and the process of labor. The subject is alienated when he cannot control this process; the worker cannot control the process of making the product. This is labeled (labor)process-alienation. The third type comes into being as a result of the existence of the first two types. Marx termed it the alienation of the man as a species being. Another term is self-alienation. The last type is a result of the existence of the prior three. There emerges alienation of man from man: 'an immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the product of his labor, from his life-activity, from his species being is the estrangement of man from man.' (Marx, 1961:103).

Now that we have described the use of the concept of alienation by Marx, we focus our attention on the concepts of functional and substantial rationality, as developed by Karl Mannheim (1893-1947). This is relevant because this conceptualization helps us to understand alienation in modern society.

Mannheim has been strongly influenced by Marx. As Marx, he also saw capitalism as the cause of (self-) alienation (Mannheim, 1966:12). In what way is this relationship established? According to Mannheim, a fundamental cause lies in the dominance of the functional rationality over the substantial rationality in the capitalist world. *Functional rationality* focuses on the relation between means and given (final) ends. This rationality is mainly concerned with effectiveness and efficiency. *Substantial rationality*, on the other hand, is interested in the appropriateness of the (final) ends as such. Mannheim sees an increasing emphasis on functional rational goals. Max Weber, by whom Mannheim was strongly influenced, notices a rising importance of functional rationality because bureaucratic principles like a vertical hierarchy of authority, are based on functional rationality and these principles increasingly penetrate society (Ritzer, 1993). For example, bureaucratic principles can be (and are) used to support totalitarian regimes or otherwise repressive systems. So these principles are mainly concerned with the optimal relationship between the means and given ends, and not the appropriateness of these ends as such. Similar notions are from Habermas (1995), stating that the life world is becoming colonized by the system rationality, or from Tönnies (2003 [1887]) who states that the 'Gesellschaft' (society) is being emphasized over the 'Gemeinschaft' (community).

Now the concepts of functional and substantial rationality are made clear, we can apply these in the *public sector*. The public sector is by definition a place where different rationalities exist (WRR, 2004). This sector is not solely about - for example - effectiveness and efficiency, but also about values like democratic legitimacy, legality, security and equality before the law. This implies that working in this sector implies that one has to find a balance between different values/rationalities, and that only focusing on for example effectiveness and efficiency is not sufficient. As the WRR stated, the public service worker is influenced by a number of rationalities, of which the institutional, the client and the professional rationality are the most important. The worker has to find a balance between these rationalities.

One important remark has to be made, however. All the above does not imply that functional rationality is in itself faulty. Procedures are not unimportant. A good financial strategy, organization and administration are of crucial importance, as the goals have to be realized optimally. But they are dependent on the desirability of these final goals of

the organization. As Ritzer (1993:1) states it more concisely: too much focus on functional rationality leads to 'the irrationality of rationality'. When this is the case, alienation can occur: 'these rationalized settings are places in which "the self was placed in confinement, its emotions controlled, and its spirit subdued." In other words, they are settings in which people cannot behave as human beings, where people are dehumanized.' (Ritzer, 1993:20).

The goal of this paragraph was a) to show that Marx concentrates on the alienation from labor and that a deep understanding of the works of Marx is of crucial importance to understand the contemporary work on the concept of alienation and b) to define functional and substantial rationality, to connect them with the alienation concept and state their importance in the public sector of today.

Public policy alienation: a definition

Now that we have a historical understanding of the concept(s) of alienation, we can define public policy alienation. To define public policy alienation, we first have to make a distinction between objective and subjective alienation, and subdivide subjective alienation in (subjective) work alienation and (subjective) job alienation. We state that public policy alienation has parallels with subjective job alienation. Thereafter, we make a case for the focus on public policy and define the concept public policy alienation.

Firstly we make a distinction between objective and subjective alienation. Marx conceptualizes the *objective alienation from labor*, e.g. the objective distance between the worker and the means of the production and the resulting product. The means of production and the product are in the hands of the capitalists, not the workers. Objective alienation is nowadays seen as a given, according to for example Fromm (1991). We just do not own the means of production, for example the phone we are using to make appointments with clients or the office we are working in. Most contemporary research does not focus on this type of alienation, but on *subjective alienation*, alienation as perceived by the worker (Hall, 1994:112). Subjective alienation is also of more importance when we relate it to the possible consequences of alienation. Our actions will depend more on the notion that we feel we are alienated from for example our job than that we are objectively alienated from the means of production because we do not own them. The most important, classic, work which focuses on alienation in a socio-psychological sense is the work of Blauner (1964, in Hall, 1994:112).¹

Our concept of public policy alienation is built on the subjective alienation literature. We aim to introduce a concept in order to understand the identification problems public service workers face towards the public policies they are supposed to implement (see section 1). These identification problems are by definition subjective.

Now that the distinction between objective and subjective alienation has been elaborated on, we distinguish between (subjective) work alienation and (subjective) job alienation. Kanungo (in Ramaswami, Agarwal, & Bhargava, 1993:191) states that *subjective work alienation* is the normative belief about the value of work in a person's life and is primarily a function of culture or socialization more than of the work the person does. Conversely, *subjective job alienation* is a concept related to the alienation from the current job a person holds and often a function of exogenous factors present in the current job situation. Articles concerning the sociology of work and organization (for example Ramaswami et al., 1993, Newton, 2002, Sarros, Tanewski, Winter, Santora, & Densten, 2002) focus primarily on job alienation, although they label it, quite confusingly, work alienation. It is clear that public policy alienation has parallels with subjective job alienation, as it is about the identification problems public service workers face towards the public policies they are supposed to implement (in their current job).

The concept of public policy alienation is closely related to the literature concerning subjective job alienation. The *innovativeness* of the concept lies in the fact that the focus of alienation here is on the public sector worker and the public policies he has to implement. Blauner and other social scientists focused on the (general) alienation from the job, and the subjects were primarily blue collar private sector workers, similar to the domain described by Marx. We,

¹ Blauner builds a lot on the work of Seeman (1959 in Vincent, 1989).

instead, focus on alienation of public policies, thereby looking at public service workers in the public sector. The reason for focusing on alienation with respect to public policies lies in the recent notions formulated by for instance the WRR (2004) and Van den Brink et al. (2006), that the public service worker experiences increasing pressures to focus on effectivity and efficiency (for example the NPM-movement) which often conflicts with his professional standards or the demands of the clients (who are becoming increasingly emancipated).

Studying alienation of public service workers and it causes is not only scientifically relevant, but also crucial for policy makers. It is for example possible that these medical practitioners love their work, but hate the policy they have to implement as a part of their job. They for instance like working with the patients and the salary, but think the policy they are implementing is perverse. However, for a good implementation, a minimal level of identification with the policy is required. For this reason, we focus on identification of the worker with the policy he is implementing. In a similar way as job alienation focuses on alienation of the worker from the job, public policy alienation, instead, focuses on alienation of the public service worker from the public policies he has to implement, which is an innovative use of the alienation concept. In so, we combine the research fields of public management (identification problems of public service workers), public policy sciences (identification problems of public service workers towards public policies) and the sociology of work and organization (using the concept of alienation to understand identification problems of public service workers towards public policies).

Now that the locus of the public policy alienation concept in the literature has been shown, we can define the concept. *Public policy alienation is defined as the mode of experience in which the public service worker, who on a regular basis interacts directly with clients, cannot identify himself with the public policies he has to implement.* This definition is partly based on the definition of self-alienation of Fromm (1991): 'By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien'. Important to notice when we look at public policy alienation is that it is not to be seen as a dichotomous variable, but as a continuous one. So a service worker can experience a lot of public policy alienation or a little. Less frequently we will find no or complete public policy alienation. When he experiences a complete alienation from public policy, the public service worker can not at all identify with the public policies he has to implement.

We have to distinguish between public policy alienation a) from a particular policy, for example alienation from a new policy concerning privatization of a government agency or b) from public policies in general. As the first type lends itself for more profound research and because research on this type is likely to have social value, we focus on policy alienation from specific policies.

This section aimed to position the concept of public policy alienation in the literature and to define the concept, thereby answering the first research question. The next section looks at main factors possibly influencing public policy alienation of public service workers.

3 PROPOSITIONS

In this section we look at the factors possibly causing public policy alienation. We have used the work of Blauner (1964) (Blauner, 1964) to construct several main determining factors of public policy alienation. He identified four main factors of job alienation, namely powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social isolation. Next to the work of Blauner, we use the concept of role conflicts (WRR, 2004). To give an overview of the chapter, the theoretical framework, which is constructed as parsimonious as possible, is shown in Figure 1:

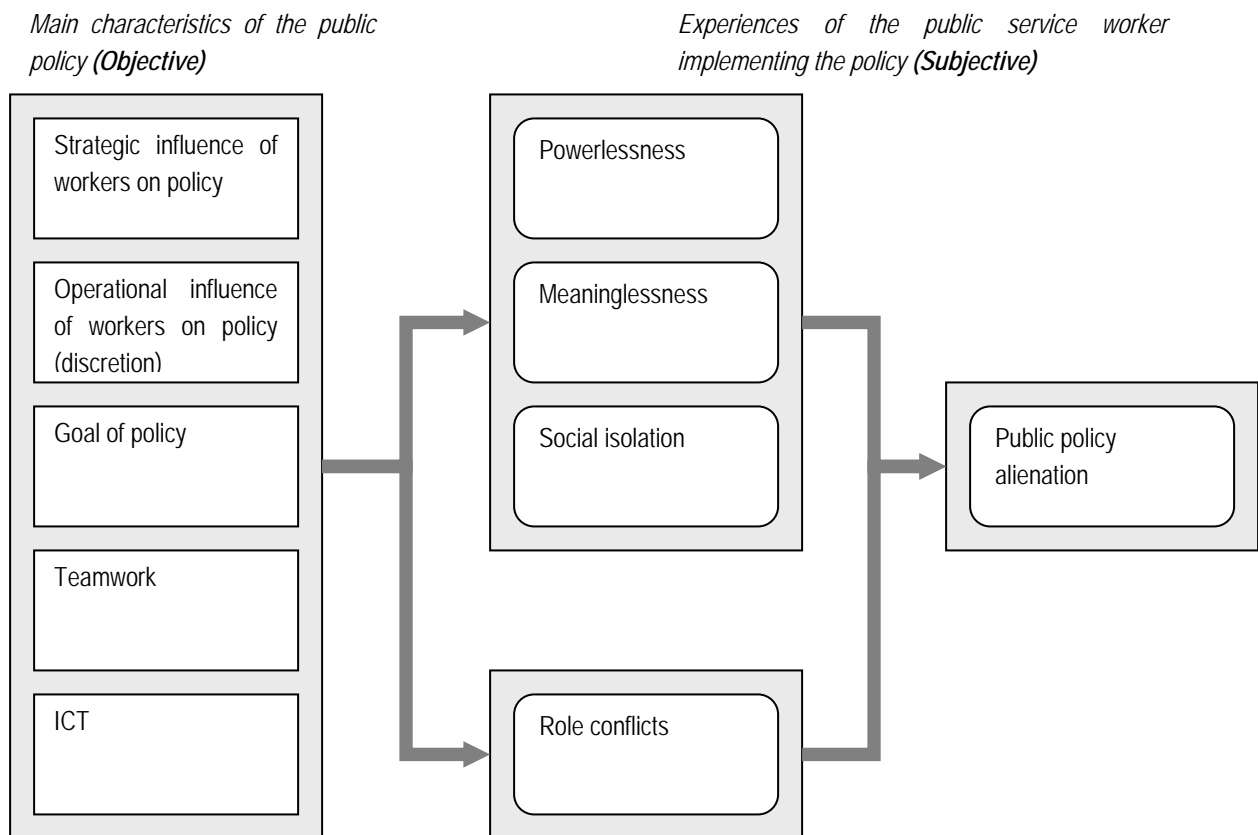


Figure 1 Theoretical framework, the characteristics of the public policy can cause alienation from this policy: e.g. when a public policy lowers the discretion of public service workers, they will feel more powerlessness, which causes public policy alienation (hypothesized).

Using the theory of Blauner theory as a starting point, we construct three main determining factors of public policy alienation; a) powerlessness b) meaninglessness and c) social isolation. It is propositioned that, when the objective characteristics of the public policy cause the worker to experience more powerlessness, meaninglessness or social isolation, his degree of public policy alienation will be higher.

An example can here clarify the important distinction between job alienation and policy alienation. Blauner (1964) looked at characteristics of the job which could lead to e.g. powerlessness: a worker feeling powerlessness feels himself as a thing, an object which is controlled and manipulated by other people or an impersonal system like

technology. Its pendant is freedom and control. In the job a worker can have a lot of discretion (=characteristic of the job), which makes him feel more powerful (experience of the worker), so less alienated from his job (job alienation). In a different case, a public policy can have as a characteristic that the discretion is severely restricted. The characteristic of the policy to be implemented allows for very low discretion, which leads to a feeling by the public service worker to be less powerful, resulting in a high degree of public policy alienation (*ceteris paribus*). The job alienation of this worker, however, does not have to change dramatically at the same time as it concerns far more aspects than the implementation of that specific policy. *So here we look at characteristics of the policy (and not the job) influencing policy alienation.* In another example, it is possible that clients are becoming more emancipated, which can result in less discretion of the worker, more powerlessness and more client alienation (and possibly more job alienation), but not more public policy alienation. So policy alienation and job alienation are distinct, but the factors causing to job alienation discerned by Blauner can nevertheless also be used to construct propositions about policy alienation.

As can be seen from the theoretical framework, several characteristics of the public policy can influence experiences of the public service worker. e.g. when a public policy lowers the discretion of public service workers, they will become more powerlessness, which causes policy alienation (hypothesized). This does not mean that every characteristic mentioned has an influence on *all* of these experiences (powerlessness, meaninglessness, social isolation, role conflicts). When it is, in our opinion, likely that such a relationship exists, a proposition is stated. In the following paragraphs these propositions are shown. We also do not want to give the impression that the given characteristics are *the* most important with respect to *every* public policy. In our opinion, the chosen characteristics are often important for the degree of public policy alienation. This leaves open the possibility that other characteristics, say the time in which the new public policy has to be fully implemented, have an effect on the degree of public policy alienation.

Powerlessness

The first main factor causing alienation stated by Blauner (1964) in his classic work 'Alienation and Freedom: The factory worker and his industry' is powerlessness. As said, a worker feeling powerlessness feels himself as a thing, an object which is controlled and manipulated by other people or an impersonal system like technology. We now show the propositions for the relationship between characteristics of the public policy, powerlessness and public policy alienation. It is propositioned that the main characteristics 1) strategic influence of workers on policy, 2) operational influence of workers on policy (discretion) and 3) ICT, influence public policy alienation through (increased) powerlessness.

The first form of powerlessness in Blauners work is that of "industrial powerlessness"; e.g. not being able to control the decisions of the general management. When we apply this concept to public policy alienation, a relevant characteristic of a public policy can be the degree of influence public servants have on this policy. This influence can be manifested on a number of levels. To keep the framework parsimonious and to the point, we distinguish two levels of the policy, the strategic and the operational level. *Influence on the strategic level of the policy* has parallels with Blauners notion of industrial powerlessness.

When there is a low degree of possible influence on the strategic level of the policy, for example the new policy is decided on by government without the help of the public service workers who have to implement this policy, this can lead to a feeling of powerlessness of these implementers. It is propositioned therefore that, the more the worker is able to influence the public policy on a strategic level, he less he alienates from this public policy.

P1: The more the public service worker is *able to influence the public policy on a strategic level*, the lower his public policy alienation.

The control over the direct work-process is the next characteristic described by Blauner. This is an important element when researching industrial settings: 'The variations in control over the immediate activity of work are a principal focus

of the present study. We shall analyze each of the four factory settings in terms of its characteristic tendency to impose restrictions and to permit freedom of action in a number of specific areas directly related to the job. Whether a worker controls his socio-technical environment depends on his freedom of movement, freedom to make choices, and freedom from oppressive constraints.' (Blauner, 1964:20). Linking this to characteristics of the public policy, control over the direct work process has parallels with the *operational influence on the policy*.

An important related concept is that of *discretion*. Lipsky (1980) described the discretion of street-level bureaucrats. He defines them also in these terms: 'Public service workers are workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work' Lipsky (1980:3). Discretion means that the street-level bureaucrats have a certain degree of freedom in making choices concerning the sort, quantity and quality of sanctions and rewards. Davis (1971:4 in Ringeling, 1978:19) gives a clear definition of discretion: 'A public officer has discretion whenever the effective limits on his power leave him free to make a choice among possible courses of action or inaction'. Police officers, for example, can determine (within boundaries set by rules and regulation, i.e. by the public policies) who to arrest and who to let go with or without a warning. There is powerlessness when the public service worker perceives not to have any discretion in implementing the public policies. This kind of powerlessness can influence the public policy alienation of the worker. When there is not much discretion because of rules and regulations of public policies, this can cause the public service worker to identify himself to a lesser extent with these public policies. When lack of discretion is caused by for example emancipated citizens this does not have to result into public policy alienation, as not the public policy itself causes the worker to have less discretion, but the clients. This can result in alienation from the clients. When the rules and regulation / the public policies leave no discretion, the worker has less control, less freedom in his work, so possibly more alienation from the public policy.

P2: The more the public service worker is *able to influence the public policy on an operational level* (the higher his discretion), the lower his public policy alienation.

Next to the characteristics concerning the influence of the workers on the public policy, ICT is also propositioned to have an influence on the degree of public policy alienation through powerlessness.

Technology has long been a very important concept in the alienation literature as it is thought to increase the level of alienation. Marx argues that technology is adapted by the capitalists to increase surplus value. The adoption of this technology results in deskilling and objective work alienation of the workers. Also Beninger (in Kumar, 2004) argues that computer-based (information) technology embodies essential characteristics that are bound to alter (or have already altered) the nature of work among workers, professionals and managers. In this respect, Zuboff (1988) differentiates between two different application possibilities of information technology. The first possibility (compare 'normal technology like machines in Marxian times') states that '[computer-based] technology can be applied to automating operations according to a logic that hardly differs from that of the nineteenth-century machine system – replace the human body with a technology that enables the same processes to be performed with more continuity and control' (Zuboff, 1988:9 my emphasis). This is coined *automate*. Linking this to policy alienation, we can state that, if the public policy causes the work to become more automated, the worker will feel more powerless (he finds it harder to control the work-process), so will alienate from the public policy. Conversely, information technology can 'generate information about the underlying productive and administrative processes through which an organization accomplishes its work. It provides a deeper level of transparency to activities that had been either partially or completely opaque.' (Zuboff, 1988:9). This is labeled *informate*. Managers can choose between these possibilities. When the informing strategy is chosen, information about the overall operation of the system is more available to the public service workers, who are able to learn and develop new skills and comprehensive understanding (Burris, 1998:148). When a public policy provides informing possibilities, workers are likely to experience more power, so less public policy alienation. This results in the next two propositions.

P3: When a public policy results in the use of more *information based technology which automates the job* of the public service worker, his public policy alienation will be higher (through a lower degree of powerlessness).

P4: When a public policy results in the use of more *information based technology which informs the job* of the public service worker, his public policy alienation will be lower (through a higher degree of powerlessness).

Meaninglessness

The former paragraph described the concept of powerlessness and main characteristics of public policy which could influence this. Generally it was propositioned: the higher the degree of powerlessness of the public service worker caused by a specific public policy, the higher his degree of public policy alienation. The second subjective concept Blauner (1964) distinguishes is *meaninglessness*. A feeling of purpose and function of the worker is its opposite. Here it is also propositioned that, the higher the degree of meaninglessness caused by a public policy, the higher the degree of public policy alienation.

Meaninglessness is in the job alienation literature defined as 'the inability to comprehend the relationship of one's contribution to a larger purpose' (Sarros et al., 2002:304). This concept, as well as the concept of powerlessness, is still heavily used in contemporary sociology of work and organization literature (Sarros et al., 2002:304). We have to distinguish between two types of meaninglessness. This first one concentrates on the influence of the worker to achieve *the goals of the public policy*. This kind of meaninglessness focuses on the perceived connection of the activities of the public service worker with the goals of the public policies. This kind of meaninglessness is complete when the public service worker cannot perceive a connection of his own activities with the goals of the public policy. The second gives attention to the meaninglessness of the *goals of the job*. This kind of meaninglessness focuses on the perceived connection of the activities of the public service worker with the goals of his job and is congruent with the concept of meaninglessness as used in contemporary subjective job alienation literature. Both types of meaninglessness can be a result of characteristics of a public policy, so both types can lead to public policy alienation.

The first main characteristic which is likely to influence meaninglessness of the public policy is *the clarity of the goals of the policy*. Looking at public administration literature, the concept of workplace goal clarity is used (Lan & Rainey, 1992). This is supposed to be high when the 'workplace goals are: well-defined, realistic, influenceable, assessable' (Arnetz, 1999). We can easily apply this to the concept of goal clarity of the public policy. It is propositioned that, when the goals of the public policy are not clear (so not well-defined, realistic, influenceable and assessable), it is harder for the public service worker to see the connection of its activities with the goals of the public policy, and he will experience more public policy alienation.

P5: The *clearer the goal(s)* of the public policy, the lower the public policy alienation of the public service worker.

The next proposition gives attention to the influence of a public policy on the meaninglessness of the public policy and of the job. It focuses on the level of *teamworking* involved in implementing the public policy. Until the 1980s teamwork was primarily seen as an important topic in the academic literature (Steijn, 2001). But since then there has been a strong increase in managerial interest. There does not seem to be a strong link between the membership of teams and the degree of discretion of the individual members of the teams (Schouteten, 2004; Steijn, 2001), so the link with powerlessness appears to be weak. However, there seems to be a connection between the membership of teams and the degree of meaninglessness. Atasoy (2004) states that small factories, team production, process technology rather than assembly methods, reduced the meaninglessness. So working in teams is propositioned to heighten the perceived connection of its own activities with goals of the job. We can now apply this to our theoretical framework. When a public policy is that is going to be implemented with the use of teams, this can cause the worker to feel less meaningless, thereby lowering the lower his degree of policy alienation.

P6: When a public policy causes the public service worker to *work more in teams*, his public policy alienation will be lower (through a lower degree of meaninglessness).

There is also a propositioned relationship between *technology* and (both types of) meaninglessness. As the informing strategy is more used, public service workers are able to get a more comprehensive understanding of the organization, as well as the goals of the organization. The perceived connection of the own activities with the goals of the job will tend to be higher. This same holds for the perceived contribution to the goals of the public policy. On the other hand, when an automating strategy is practiced, the division of tasks will be higher. This results in more meaninglessness: 'lower levels of skill variety and task identity mean employees experience a sense of meaninglessness, a critical psychological state that signifies lower levels of internal work motivation.' (Sarros et al., 2002:289).

P7: When a public policy causes that more *information based technology is used to automate the job* of the public service worker, his public policy alienation will be lower (through a lower degree of meaninglessness).

P8: When a public policy causes that more *information based technology is used to informate the job* of the public service worker, his public policy alienation will be higher (through a higher degree of meaninglessness).

Social isolation

The third subjective concept Blauner (1964) distinguishes is *social isolation*. Social isolation is a lack of a sense of belonging and an inability to identify with the organization. Looking at the main characteristics, ICT and teamwork seem relevant.

Looking at the relationship between social isolation and *ICT*, Blauner (1964:25) states that 'technology has an important impact on social alienation because it determines a number of aspects of industrial structure that affect cohesion and integration: the occupation distribution of the blue collar labor force, the economic cost structure of the enterprise, the typical size of the plant, and the existence and structure of work groups.' (Blauner, 1964:25). As can be seen here, technology influences 'the existence and structure of work groups', in other words, *teamwork*. In our opinion technology in itself does not promote or degrade social isolation for public service workers as the technology they cope with normally concerns ICT, as opposed to the manufacturing technology the blue collar workers in Blauners study use. For this reason, we do not construct a separate proposition concerning the relationship between technology and social isolation. But it is propositioned that, if the public policy is going to be implemented with the use of teams, this can cause worker to feel less socially isolated (for obvious reasons), thereby lowering the lower his degree of policy alienation.

P9: When a public policy causes the public service worker to *work more in teams*, his public policy alienation will be lower (through a lower degree of social isolation).

Role conflicts

In the former three paragraphs, we have used the dimensions of Blauner to construct hypotheses about policy alienation. These dimensions are extensively used in job alienation literature. According to us there is, however, also another important factor which could explain variation in policy alienation. This is similar with the dimensions discerned by Blauner as it is about perceptions of the worker, but it is distinct as it explicitly focuses on the influence of different roles/rationalities on the public service worker. The WRR (2004) speaks in this regard of a number of different rationalities (or roles) which are influencing the public worker and which are mentioned in the introduction of this paper. These rationalities are of critical importance nowadays: the public service worker is faced with different and often contradicting rationalities. Blauner did not account for this factor of alienation, as it is not of critical importance for job

alienation in industrial companies. But as the public sector multiple values and rationalities are very common and important (WRR, 2004; Van der Lans, 2006). This paragraph looks at the different possibilities of *role conflicts* between these rationalities and their influence on policy alienation.

The classical definition of the role concept originates from the cultural anthropologist Linton (1936 in Siegerist, 1979:89). Linton sees a social system as constituted by different interrelated statuses. A status is a collection of rights and duties. A role is the dynamic aspect of a status: 'The individual is socially assigned to a status and holds it in relation to other statuses. When he puts the rights and duties, that constitute the status into effect, he performs a role' (Linton 1936:114 in Siegerist, 1979:89).

Conflicts can arise in the role-set of a person. Role conceptions are opinions of the public service worker concerning the activities which form part of his role, and which do not. Role expectations are opinions of a role sender concerning which activities form part of the role of the public service worker. These expectations are perceived by a person. There can be a difference between the role expectations of different role senders: when this is the case, a role conflict is born.

We now centre our attention on role conflicts possibly arising for public service workers. The WRR (2004) focuses on these role conflicts. There are different role-senders (WRR: different rationalities) for public sector workers who directly interact with clients. The public service worker can perceive that these role senders are in conflict. Some public policies focus on equal access and efficiency, while the clients want tailored solutions and professional organizations focus on professional norms (WRR, 2004:218). The WRR (2004:57) distinguishes three role senders/rationalities: the institutional role-sender, the professional role sender and the client role sender.

We can now look at possible role conflicts and the results for public policy alienation. This is done by means of an example. Suppose the *goal of a new public policy* (a main characteristic) is to reduce the costs for the health care sector. This is by definition a functional rational goal (see section 2). The clients do not fully agree with this new policy, as their goal/highest value, which is being optimally treated, sometimes conflicts with the goal of the new policy. The professional association (professional rationality) is also not satisfied with this new policy as professional norms sometimes cannot be implemented fully. When the worker perceives these different rationalities, he is confronted with a role conflict. The professional association poses demands on him, as are the clients and the new public policy. This is likely to cause policy alienation, as the public service worker prefers not perceiving a role conflict to perceiving a role conflict. But the degree of public policy alienation resulting from the role conflict is dependent on the degree of identification of the worker with the different role senders. When he can for instance identify very well with the clients and the professional association, the level of public policy alienation will be higher.²

Looking at the relationship between the main characteristics of a policy and the role conflicts, it is clear that most characteristics can lead to role conflicts. For this reason, the last proposition is generally formulated.

P10: When a public policy causes stronger *role conflicts* as perceived by the public service worker, his level of policy alienation rises.

The goal of this section was to develop a theoretical framework, showing the characteristics of the public policy which can cause alienation from this policy. In so doing, it answered the second research question. The next section concludes the paper and gives suggestions for further research.

² This is of course circular causal,, e.g. when he identifies with the policy, and the policy causes a role conflict, this results in a little less identification with the policy. So $X \rightarrow Y \rightarrow X$. The important notion here, is that characteristics public policy can cause role conflicts, which can further lessen the degree of identification with the public policy.

4 CONCLUSION

We theoretically examined identification problems of public service workers with public policies. According to for instance the WRR (2004) and Van den Brink et al. (2006), these workers are increasingly experiencing identification problems. Causes are on the one hand, changes brought about by movements like New Public Management, which focuses on functional rational goals, and increasing pressures from emancipated citizens and stronger professional organizations on the other. We stated this identification problem in terms of public policy alienation, a concept inspired by the job alienation concept developed within the field of sociology of work and organization.

The purpose of the paper was to conceptualize public policy alienation of public service workers. Another purpose was, by using literature from various research fields, to investigate which factors possibly influence the degree of this public policy alienation.

Public policy alienation was positioned as having parallels with subjective job alienation, e.g. the perception of the worker that he is alienated from the work he is doing. The innovativeness of the public policy alienation concept lies in the fact that it focuses on the alienation from the public policy, instead of on the job. Next to this it focuses, as opposed to mainstream job alienation literature, on public service workers instead of private (blue collar) workers. The concept was defined as *the mode of experience in which the public service worker, who on a regular basis interacts directly with clients, cannot identify himself with the public policies he has to implement.*

By using literature from various fields, we thereafter developed a theoretical framework, showing the main characteristics of the public policy which can cause alienation from this policy, using the theory of Blauner and the concepts of the WRR. The framework is not exhaustive; the main factors which are supposed to influence public policy alienation are not the only possible factors.

Further research can use this theoretical framework as a starting point for empirically researching identification problems of public service workers.

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